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## Falling dance: Hijikata's recomposition of the body via Bacon

Fusako Innami

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# Falling dance: Hijikata's recomposition of the body via Bacon

Fusako Innami 

Durham University, UK

## ABSTRACT

The themes of transformation, indefinite form, and disintegration haunt the work of many post-World War II artists, who had witnessed the animality of human beings as well as the depths to which human beings can fall in wartime. This paper looks at falling as an artistic and phenomenological practice of the body in the work of the Japanese butoh dancer Tatsumi Hijikata, whose notations refer in places to the work of the Irish-born British painter Francis Bacon and offer new bodily lexicons with which to graph the movement of falling. Drawing explicitly on Bacon and using cross-media collage to produce movement, a body in Hijikata could be deformed or made formless onto the ground. In falling, inhabiting and simultaneously vacating oneself, the body makes contact with a surface and leaves or *exteriorizes* a graphic mark, visual, and performative, in its wake. This attention to falling was part of an ongoing process at the rise of phenomenological boom in postwar Japan by which artists attempted to understand and recompose the kind of body that could inhabit the nuclear age.

## KEYWORDS

Falling; senses; phenomenology; Tatsumi Hijikata; Francis Bacon

"We fall because we are human, it is only because we live that we fall ... We must discover ourselves and save ourselves, by falling to the best of our ability."

(Sakaguchi 1986, 5)

## Deformation and the senses

In his 1972 performance *Hōsō tan* (*A Story of Smallpox*),<sup>1</sup> Japanese dancer Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986) performed the body of "not standing," or of "being unable to stand," by crawling on the ground [See [Figure 1](#)], nearly naked, covered with white butoh make-up like vernix or some sort of dust or cobweb. Hijikata, emphasizing its weakened, sickened, fragmented state, called it *suijaku tai*, the weakened body. The performance seems literally to be an attempt to stand in the midst of falling. In Hijikata's performance filmed as *Natsu no Arashi* (*Summer Storm*) in 1973 (Hijikata 2003), at the Westside Auditorium of Kyoto University, the slow movements of the dancer(s) in the series on leprosy seem to blur the boundary between the living and the dead. In "Slackness," a section performed in darkness and accompanied by chanting a baby's cries, three dancers come on stage making small jerky movements that seem to defy any straight body lines supported by the spine, after which Hijikata, trembling, crumples to the floor, with the make-up seemingly

**CONTACT** Fusako Innami  [fusako.innami@durham.ac.uk](mailto:fusako.innami@durham.ac.uk)

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**Figure 1.** Tatsumi Hijikata, *Hōsō tan* (*A Story of Smallpox*), Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons, 1972  
© Makoto Onozuka. Courtesy of Keio University Art Center and Butoh Laboratory, Japan.

sliding off his skin. Hijikata enacted the deformation of the body on stage, with his notations (see below) often inspired by visual images, including the work of Irish-born British painter Francis Bacon (1909–1992), and his own expression of that preoccupation has had a decisive influence on later dance and art practitioners.

After Hijikata's renowned performance *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin—Nikutai no Hanran* (*Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese: Rebellion of the Body*) in 1968, the Japanese literary journal *Gendai shi Techō* dedicated two volumes (1969) to the exploration of the “flesh and language” (*nikutai to gengo*), including the analysis of Hijikata's aim as the phenomenological reduction of the body to its original condition.<sup>2</sup> As dance critic Kazuko Kuniyoshi points out (2004, 64), the weakened body in Hijikata's *A Story of Smallpox* contains a subtextual reference to a tale in a collection *Nihon Ryōiki* [Record of Miraculous Events in Japan] compiled in the late eighth to early ninth century, in which a monk dreams of witnessing his corpse being burned with firewood, melting, and falling apart.<sup>3</sup> Takashi Morishita also writes of Hijikata's dance; “it arises from the rejection of refined movements [as in ballet] and from the gaze on one's own disintegrated flesh” (2000, 60, my translation unless otherwise indicated). The unstable body in the work involved a pivoting movement of the seer to the seen, with the body left vulnerable and exposed: the body occupying itself but also losing control.

My purpose in this essay is to investigate how we can reconceive the art of falling as a way to further develop an understanding of sense experience, instead of simply reiterating points made in essays on Hijikata from the perspective of dance studies or Japanese studies. I want to make Hijikata's falling part of the conversation in an interdisciplinary study of the senses, by asking what exactly was at stake in his artistic practice and method, while also actively engaging with the way he interacted with visual arts. When one perceives the seeing body as simultaneously seen, and the touching body as touched, the relationship between the subject and the object reverses and switches back

and forth; in Merleau-Ponty's words, "Perception is a moment of the living dialectic of a concrete subject" ([1963] 2015, 166). It is in this context that I want to examine artistic practices of falling, looking particularly at how they relate to certain phenomenological concerns, such as the reflexive awareness of the self and the reversibility between perceiver and perceived, subject and object. My analysis will take falling as an expression of oscillation, by which I mean a continuous movement with a sense of resistance against stability and settledness. I argue that the exploration of a new identity embodied in the artistic practice of falling produced new lexicons and bodily languages to reimagine the body in the nuclear age.

## The new embodiedness

Hijikata's work can be understood in relation to a broader postwar urge,<sup>4</sup> for the recognition of individual carnal sensations. Under the wartime body politic in Japan, the national body centered on the emperor's body as the collective one: it subsumed the bodies of individuals, erasing their personal carnality, rendering it anonymous and indiscernible. Bodies were fragmented into a low-contrast mass of limbs in Tsuguharu Fujita's (1886–1968) war-time paintings such as *Final Fighting on Attu* in 1943 and *Compatriots on Saipan Island Remain Faithful to the End* in 1945, which portray mass psychology through the graphic depiction of individuality subsumed in the national polity (*kokutai*; literally "national body"); as Ming Tiampo puts it, "[T]he painting is characterized by this *refusal to focus on a single individual*" (2011, 39). It was after such experiences, where individual flesh melted away, that postwar artists and writers turned their attention to the individual body and the concept of embodiedness as a subjective site of living the autonomous self.

Within a few years of Japan's defeat, literary, political, and philosophical expression began to flourish. At the same time, an inquiry focusing on individual subjectivity, bodily awareness, and intentionality, began to occupy an explicit position in Japanese public debates (Slaymaker 2002, 100–101), overlapping with heightened interests in existentialism and phenomenology. Ango Sakaguchi (1906–1955), one of the Japanese writers who focused on individual carnality and flesh immediately after the war, made in 1946 his pronouncements about *daraku* ("the fall," or "fallenness," sometimes translated as "decadence") which he argued accompanies human beings' entry into the world (1986, 5), claiming that an individual, by falling, can discover and rescue him or herself. Wartime physical experience exposed the human flesh and made it fall to the bottomless pit through which one needed to think about what it is to be human.

A new Japanese artistic movement from the late 1950s to the 1970s, often considered the "second wave" of the avant-garde, led to a search for a new bodily identity and discourse, and subsequently to a phenomenology boom and the rise of the theory of embodiedness, called *shintai ron*. Against a backdrop of student uprisings and antiwar protests, students, activists, actors, and artists formed theatrical collectives, met at bars and night clubs, and read Merleau-Ponty, Marx, Sartre, Sade, and the folklorists Shinobu Orikuchi and Kunio Yanagita, along with graphic comic books (Sas 2011, 158). Also, for postwar practitioners of the avant-garde, there seemed to be no barriers between photography, writing, painting, and dance (Marable 2000, 86); photographer Eikoh Hosoe (1933–) grafted close shots of the back, spine, muscles, and the physicality of the bare flesh onto the screen's surface, together with butoh dancers Tatsumi Hijikata and

Yoshito Ohno (1938–2020), in a 1960 short film *Heso to Genbaku* (*Navel and a Bomb*), accompanied by a light jazz soundtrack and opening abstract word. In such a cross-genre collaborative climate, Hijikata, the founder of *butoh* dance, gradually started to enact bodily deformation and falling in his dance practice.

Although *butoh* has been introduced in a context that stresses the mystic, esoteric, grotesque, and the ritualistic, in a way that makes a direct connection with the A-bomb apocalypse,<sup>5</sup> the preoccupation with deformation expressed in *butoh* stems from everyday life. As Kuniyoshi remarks, *butoh* was neither a propagandistic expression against nuclear bombs nor simply a depiction of flesh; rather, it suggested that destruction equivalent to the level of a bombing exists in different forms in everyday life, whose traces appear in *butoh* expression (2004, 12). Moreover, its emergence was multicultural, with elements of German modern dance, French mime, Spanish dance, jazz and American modern dance, although Hijikata's fascination with dance hall scenes of Tokyo under the Allied Occupation (1945–1952) also made him experience a “total loss of identity” (Hoffman 1987, 11). This was due apparently to the spectacle of Japanese women consorting with American military personnel, mirroring the weakened or effeminized Japanese male bodies due to defeat. The Japanese imperial system at the end of the war was discussed with the metaphor of an “empty centre,” lacking in substance and responsibility as a “feminized” figure (Ueno 2005, 239–41). Hijikata himself conceived of the emperor's body as having “become thin,” “enfeebled,” and “wavering” in his 1977 essay “*Yameru Maihime*” [The Sick Dancer] ([1998] 2016, 109). His preoccupation with the weakened body thus overlapped with wider political and social concerns in the postwar everyday life.

In the face of the widespread westernization that took place in Japan in the aftermath of the war, Hijikata gradually came to establish his own method of expression, deconstructing the upright body and focusing on its relation to the earth. In his work, Hijikata called for a remembering of “origins” – these “origins,” however, are not located in the past, but emerge through creativity or by a spilling over of the self onto the exterior. As Myriam Sas puts it: “This *informe* [formless] secretion that appears ‘of itself,’ or is secreted of itself, challenges the intuitive/conventional idea of origins” (2011, 163). The theme of transformation, indefinite form, and falling apart haunted Hijikata, who confronted death and life head-on in the postwar confusion, and expressed his preoccupations especially at the Asbestos Studio, the main hub for avant-garde dance in the 1950s and the creative place of *butoh* in the 1960s, founded by Akiko Motofuji (1928–2003) on the site of a former sanatorium for leprosy in Tokyo.

It was an ongoing process to try to understand what kind of body lives in the nuclear age. A series of photographs put out in 1961 by Shōmei Tōmatsu (1930–2012) taken in the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9 1945, show bodies melted and deformed, and glass too, transformed by the atomic heat apparently into limbs and flesh [See Figure 2]. In his analysis of psychoanalysis, cinema, and X-rays, Akira Mizuta Lippit has drawn attention to the three “phenomenologies of the inside,” to turn the image content (inside) out: making the inside visible by penetrating and exscribing it, “between the worlds of visibility and invisibility” (2005, 3). Attention to the individual flesh and its lived experience, as well as bodily engagement with surfaces, was pervasive in the work of postwar artists in other parts as well. Yves Klein (1928–1962) and his naked models started rolling in pigment and painting with their bodies: his *Anthropometries* series, using human



**Figure 2.** Shomei Tomatsu, *Bottle Melted and Deformed by Atomic Bomb Heat, Radiation, and Fire, Nagasaki*, 1961. Gelatin silver print; 13 15/16 x 12 15/16 in. (35.4 x 32.86 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of the Kurenboh Collection © Shomei Tomatsu – INTERFACE. Photograph: Don Ross.

bodies as living brushes, led to his work *Hiroshima* in 1961. A particular color of a deep azure blue graphed a form of the lived, as much as the shadows of Hiroshima, Klein writes in 1961, constituted “evidence of hope for the permanence (though immaterial) of the flesh” (1982, 230). Klein’s interest in phenomenology (here, related to the immediacy of experience) led him to act from within with dry pigment, synthetic resin on paper on canvas. The attention to the flesh as a lived experience was a shared concern to show how the inside could be expressed on the outside in this atomic age.

What is graphed into space or onto a surface performatively demands that we physically engage with it. John Whittier Treat writes that we study atomic bomb literature not so much to “know” the physical effects of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as to “give us the psychological means to act aware of that knowledge,” thereby questioning writing capability as well as the capability of writing itself (1995, xv). I would argue that such psychological means involves physical, bodily, and even visceral knowledge. Or, at least in the phenomenological understanding of the body in the twentieth century (and perhaps as a response to the wave of injured returnees from WWI, as Merleau-Ponty explicates in his 1945 *Phenomenology of Perception*), knowledge is perceptual, psychological, and



physical. Its lived aspect illuminated via the reversibility between the subjective and objective understanding of things is further applied to the encroachment between the tangible and the visible in Merleau-Ponty (1968, 133–34). It is this interconnectedness that shapes our understanding of what we come into contact with through our senses, what we perceive, and also our very sense of self.

## Enacting falling

Hijikata's early works are marked by an intense eroticism – often influenced by literary works by Yukio Mishima, Jean Genet, Georges Bataille, and others, starting with *Kinjiki* (*Forbidden Colors*) in 1959. Later in the 1970s, however, he became preoccupied with the fragility and instability of the flesh, and started presenting the body in dances that emphasized downward movement. In his dances we notice gestures and movements involving a hunched back, a deeply-bent knee, a foot raised with heel off the ground, and bowed legs, suggesting a stance shaped through long years of farming (turning back to his origins in the farming area of Akita prefecture in northern Japan); Hijikata, Morishita writes, made the body tremble, crawling on stage (2014, 17). Inspired by the work of Francis Bacon, Hans Bellmer, Narashige Koide, Henri Michaux, Egon Schiele, J. M. W. Turner, Wols and others, Hijikata presented the body overflowing its boundaries. Gathering fragments of visual images and noting corresponding vocabularies for a choreography, Hijikata condensed gesture. Yoshie Yoshida, who collaborated with Hijikata, considers the pictorial in such a process as the trace of gesture through sensory interactions (2004, 40).

In the age of man-made atrocities, incorporating tropes from an array of artists using such media as photography and radiography, Francis Bacon often depicted his figures in terms of flesh, meat, and in particular, bodily deformation. In his early example of bodily deformation, *Two Figures in a Room* (1959), two naked deformed bodies – one crouching with back turned to the spectator, the other just visible in a lying position, colored in green, yellow, and purple, at the edge of a circular space in mottled red and purple – entangle with each other and with themselves. In Bacon's *Three Figures and Portrait* (1975), inside the circle, we see a figure (George Dyer) who is neatly dressed, but outside the circle a naked body with an exposed, jutting backbone, like an ironic reference to an X-ray, which is to make the invisible visible. Dawn Ades has noted the use made in Bacon's work of the target circle of radiography, or the X-ray, to "demarcate a change of focus in the painting," which, instead of aiding the correct positioning of the body, operates "perversely in the area *outside* the circle" (1985, 17). Bacon, aiming "to bring the figurative thing up onto the nervous system" (Sylvester 1980, 12), presented the potentiality of a body, beyond what it might possibly hold within it.

Despite considerable contemporary discussions on the intimations of violence and horror in his artwork, Bacon opposed the idea of a painting as an illustration that tells a story – rather, the violence in his work is that of suggestion within the image conveyed through paint, transmitting sensation (Sylvester 1980, 65, 81–82). Gilles Deleuze, in his 1981 work *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, describes the relationship between sensation and falling in his analysis of deformed bodies by Bacon: "[S]ensation," he writes, "develops through the fall, by falling from one level to another" (2003, 67). The monstrosity and animality of the human figure behind the depictions of flesh, mouth, and



teeth in Bacon's works made Deleuze think of meat as indiscernible "zone of man and the beast" (2003, 21). The human-animal interrogation was similarly invoked by others, but in particular, Elisabeth Frink, an admirer of Bacon, who believed that the twentieth century fundamentally transformed the human senses, in that "they had been so brutalized that they no longer responded to atrocities" (Winner 2019, 37). In a zone of indiscernibility where the suffering man is a beast and the suffering beast is a man as he is "becoming," writes Deleuze, "the flesh seems to *descend* from the bones, while the bones rise up from the flesh" (2003, 21). Bacon brought the deformed body to the fore as a potentiality of what man's body may become.

Falling (apart) connotes pain, alienation, and fragmentation in a Judeo-Christian sense: it involves the splintering of subject and object, the painful disjunction of dual consciousness, and an alienation from the world (Vanhoutte 2002, 103). All the while, the body bears witness and experiences its very being in the trial of understanding its given condition, as the fallenness discussed by Sakaguchi in which the physical and ideological exposure to the bare flesh enables one's search for existence. André Lepecki, looking at a set of performance pieces from 1978 by William Pope.L known as "crawls," discusses a minimal movement as oscillation "between absence and presence, concealing and revealing, visibility and invisibility, unity and multiplicity" (2006, 90). In Pope.L's question of presence related to stumbling, one can only "be" oneself through crawling over the uneven, cracked, and grooved ground, onto which the body is pressed. In Hijikata's work we see a figure precariously balanced, unable to stand, as if to suggest that it is through falling, or "dying but trying to get up" (Kurihara 2000, 12), that one can experience a different aspect of the self. As a result of a movement from within, sensation<sup>6</sup> occurs when the body stumbles.

Hijikata's slow movements subsequently graphed onto the ground in sections of "Leprosy" in *Summer Storm* expose the performing body fallen onto the ground. Hijikata, concerned to move between pictorial images and bodily movements via his own poetic language, has something in common with and was indeed inspired by Antonin Artaud. Artaud's attempt, for example in "The Theater of Cruelty" manifested in 1932, aimed to allow theater to remain unsubjected by text, to "rediscover the notion of a kind of unique language halfway between gesture and thought" (Artaud 1976, 242).<sup>7</sup> Among his series of collage-like works called "Spells," Artaud, using wax crayon on burnt paper in his 1939 work "Spell for Sonia Mossé," wrote, "You will live as dead, you will never stop the process of dying and descending" (1997, 149). Images, physicality, and poetic language altogether contributed to the reconceptualization of the body: an attempt on the part of these practitioners to revitalize the flesh through its bareness and trembling movements between standing and falling, living, and dying. The following section articulates the relationship between falling and writing or "graphing" in Hijikata's practice, both enriching creative bodily movements.

### **Becoming formless through graphing**

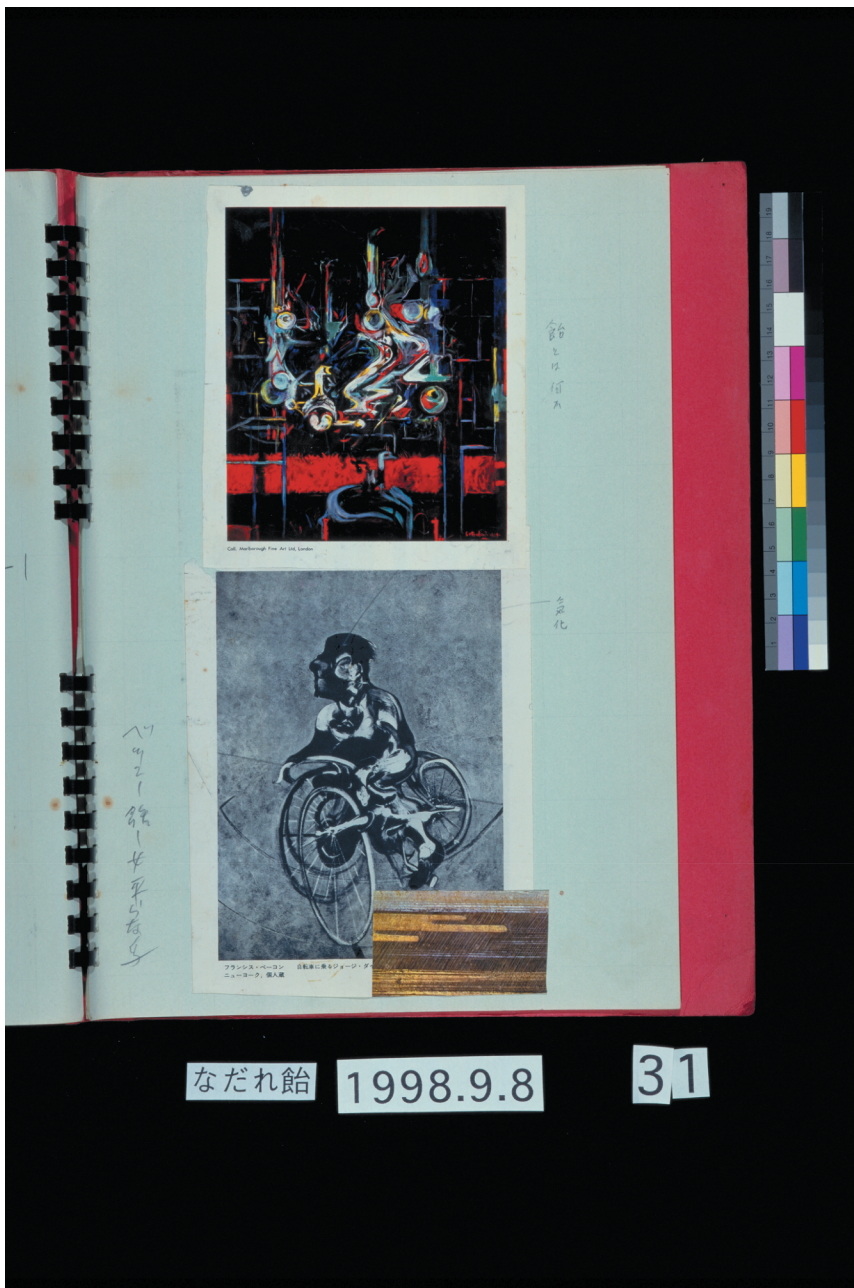
Hijikata pursued the precarious, unbalanced, and disintegrated body, and particularly, bodily "becoming." While enacting bodily deformation on the stage, Hijikata also demonstrated a desire to choreograph, score, and verbalize everyday bodily sensations in a way that would deconstruct movements. Records of Hijikata's notations, chiefly comprising his

notes of instructions and scrapbooks, show the frequent use he made of fragmentary, often poetic language. This fragmentary language that reiterates the visual in his own manner, together with his other marginal jottings on deformation that often refer to transformability, disjoins and reconstructs bodily movements.

Hijikata's *butoh fu* were not strictly speaking conventional dance notation, designed to record codified segments of movement, but rather creative notebooks that contained and saved certain images for dance movements using notes and pictures. On a page in one scrapbook, titled *Nadare ame* (*Avalanche Candy*), featuring Bacon's work *Portrait of George Dyer Riding a Bicycle* (1966), in which Dyer's flesh is sculpted, somehow displaced from its outside shadowy contour [See [Figure 3](#), bottom], Hijikata jots down, "*kika*" (vaporization), and "*bekkō ame – onna tairana tori*" (*bekko candy – woman flat bird*), *bekkō ame* being a type of hardened, flat, usually amber-colored candy.<sup>8</sup> Hijikata's dance work *Avalanche Candy*, which he performed in the same series of work with *A Story of Smallpox*, carries the idea of melting in its title: the word *ame* or candy combines with *nadare*, a crumbling to pieces. Being haunted by change and indefinite form and falling apart – as he found in leprosy, pus, fog and crumbling flesh – Hijikata enacted on a stage a transformation. I would underline the importance of the translation from visual image into poetic language, which reenacts in itself a search for bodily transformation through the pulling apart of bodily gestures and movements. Hijikata's language – including the one jotted in the margins of visual scraps and the one orally transmitted to his disciples – functioned as a mediator between the visual and bodily lexicons; both verbal and visual languages contributed to Hijikata's experiments on bodily transformations.

The desire for the body to fall or overflow from any singular definite shape, I claim, conversely resulted in the composition of a particular inter-media language with which to think about bodily movements. Hijikata took segments of visual images to combine with his language to think about movement. Yukio Waguri, a disciple of Hijikata, reconstructed Hijikata's words to use *butoh fu* for his dance lesson. The abstract words in a section on Bacon were to be expressed by actual movements associated with rubber as per other instructions in *butoh fu* that followed Hijikata's fragmentary words,<sup>9</sup> followed by further bodily instructions and by Bacon's visual images, such as *Three Studies of Figures on Beds* (1972). Dancers were required on the basis of these words to transform Bacon's images of an elastic human body into bodily movements that emerged in a kind of sequence. As Bruce Baird explains, Hijikata's movement makes "one appendage do the work of another" – for example turning "a thumb into a heel and let[ting] a hand walk across the stage" (2012, 150). The elaborate process of effecting bodily movements is understood only through the layer of creative re-composition.

If language and images are both constituents of systems of knowledge, Hijikata severed their sequence, effecting a decomposition and a discontinuity. The terms to mean indefinite form (such as the Japanese word *futeikei* or the French word *informe*) that are often employed to explain Hijikata's work derive from Bataille's 1929 short article titled "*Informe*" ("*Formless*"). Bataille writes, "*formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing has its form." "[A]ffirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit" (1985, 31). To put it another way, while systems of knowledge – or coding – are required for anything to take a shape, "*formless*" designates a contrasting state in which something



**Figure 3.** Tatsumi Hijikata, *Butoh fu – Nadare ame*. Courtesy of Keio University Art Center and Butoh Laboratory, Japan.

can be squashed endlessly and from every angle. Hijikata's desire to go beyond established form conversely required him to embody a layered coding through words and images, which then aided his body to respond to external stimuli to vacate his own body.

By employing verbal, visual, and bodily languages to capture pose, gesture, and movement, Hijikata exposed the bare body to explore what the body can do and become. Such a discontinuous re-composition across multimedia lexicons seems to have necessitated falling for Hijikata. Articulating Hijikata's dance through twelve verb vocabularies, critic Nario Gōda concludes that there is no way for butoh dancers' sensibility to "stand." As Gōda explained, Asbestos Studio for Hijikata meant a space for the dead; "standing" as an active verb was not possible there (1985, 101). And yet, an exploration of new language was necessary both for falling and for standing. Critic Tatsuhiko Shibusawa surmises that Hijikata might have explained it thus, "Those who try to learn flying at some point need to learn first to stand, walk, run, twist, and dance – One cannot reach flight by flying" ([1983] 2011, 232). Hijikata had to know how to stand in order to dance; equally, to know how to stand, he had to fall. And a score arises through the very process, as Laurence Louppe writes, recreated "in the very arising of events, starting from determined modules reorganized at each performance, and in the unexpected corporeal events it triggers as a result of their encounter or their succession" (2014, 94). Hijikata searched for the possibilities of the flesh through bending and twisting without anywhere to settle. Falling occurs to pursue the potentiality in carnal language.

What Hijikata did in his notebooks with visual scraps that allowed him to cut, dislocate, and annotate to shape bodily lexicons for new movements, can be compared to the visual markings Bacon achieved on the surface of Muybridge's sequential photographs. The latter's serial photographs of humans and animals had long been a rich visual resource for Bacon, who effected even more tactile engagement with photographic surfaces by fragmenting, twisting, marking, effacing, and eroding the prints, "transforming them to the equivalents of preliminary studies" (Harrison 2009, 80). Using photographs not as references but as "triggers" of ideas (Sylvester 1980, 30), Bacon took the material fact of the photograph and, in the words of Ades, overlaid it with accidental marks "to create the 'graph' of his painting" (1985, 22). Both Bacon and Hijikata engaged with out-of-sequence, decomposed segments of physical surfaces which allowed for a recomposition of the body in their own in-between languages involving the reenactment of others' bodily movements. The studies of bodily twist, curve, fall, and transformation were made possible through collage – using text, image, annotation, marking, and mixed-media elaboration. Such cross-media interactions offered a rich multiplicity of ways in which to recompose the body: formless.

Hijikata employed bodily movements of contraction or shrinking which were also associated with Bacon's paintings, to refer to what the performer had to do; one needs first to gather the flesh to the center. The contraction of the body – which could be centered around the pit of the stomach or womb, or the abdomen, curving round and making it dense – gathers the carnal force for transformation; in Gōda's words, it is an extreme "heightening of the voltage of the flesh" (1985, 102). And yet at one point in Hosoe's short film *Navel and a Bomb* (1960) choreographed by Hijikata, a boy has a long umbilical cord pulled out through his navel. The cord is cut, and he starts crying, as if to suggest that there is now no center that can gather the voltage of the flesh. For Hijikata the body of contraction or centering simultaneously brought dislocation, lack of groundedness, and an outward move.

The subject body becomes itself as the perceived when the relationship between the subject and object wavers. For Merleau-Ponty the enigma of the self derives from the fact

that one's body is seeing and being seen simultaneously, touching and touched, visible and sensitive, bearing the duality of front and back, past and future (2007, 354). In Merleau-Ponty's account of pictorial depth in his 1961 essay "Eye and Mind," where a painter's vision no longer stays outside and the painter is born in the things, the picture is "a spectacle of something only by being a 'spectacle of nothing,' by breaking the 'skin of things'" (2007, 370).<sup>10</sup> Instead of being made into things as construction, art happens through the encounter with the self, the thing inhabiting itself while not being contained within. Things become themselves by animating themselves. Hijikata's falling captures this wavering moment of inhabiting its body – but not fully – by stumbling, and seeing itself stumbling through different perspectives.

Connecting the idea of painting as a spectacle to Bacon via Merleau-Ponty, Armin Zweite argues that Bacon's works are both a "drama of nothing," as nothing opens up behind his images, and a "drama of something," because things are shown "exploded, deformed, fragmented, liquefied, or dematerialised, as if in the process of emergence and disintegration" (2006, 233). This happens with the refusal to create the drama of bodily deformation, which conversely reveals bare physicality. Allowing the body to be nothing other than itself while being transformed to the unknown, Hijikata and Bacon practiced, or potentially advanced, whether consciously or unconsciously, the phenomenological enigma of the self. And their specific method was falling.

## Conclusion

Hijikata, through his interaction with Bacon's and others' artwork, demonstrates in his work that the body flows out – whether this is onto the paper surface or onto the stage through layers of bodily traces – by making the body twist, curve, deform, and fall. The oscillation Hijikata as well as Bacon experimented was not only between the subject and the object, but also between gravity pulling and body resisting, as demonstrated by the bodies in their work which crawl on the ground and stumble to rise. These attempts led to new discoveries in the bodily lexicon, reflecting the self.

The body as experienced is a way of grasping the world, not only when there is synthesis between the subject and the object, but also when they meet at the unsustainable moment in falling. With a combination of exposure to surrealist and phenomenological concerns and an engagement with the postwar quest for bodiliness, Hijikata explored the potentiality of the flesh in falling. Although the atomic effects made the body inside out and deformed in a way that one could never have previously imagined, avant-garde artists also pushed the limits of the body via explorations of the interrelationality between bodies, images, and languages, in a quest to find out how to "live" the body.

Such a language did not arise from the mind but possibly from a region below, a space where the body might fall: as Artaud puts, "while the bodies that they saw around me did not come out of me but from the earth where I had sweated and made caca" (1974). This approach, which involved viewing oneself as always potentially indistinguishable from the ground, was endemic among those who had experienced life on the frontline of war, in camps, or in burnt-out cities. In such a context, acquiring new lexicons required attending to the language of bodies. Falling, a practice of the oscillation of being, offered the body to become decomposed and transformed. The



chain of such activity leaves traces in space as movement, the accumulation of which becomes a falling dance.

## Notes

1. It was part of a serial work titled *Shiki no Tame no Nijūshichiban* (*Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons*), presented at the Shinjuku Art Theater and dedicated to Japanese surrealist critic and poet Shūzō Takiguchi.
2. Takashi Morishita – referring to Mieko Kanai’s analysis of Hijikata’s dance with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological understanding of the body that questioned body-mind dualism (Kanai 1969, 22) – interprets such a discourse on the body with the Japanese translation of Merleau-Ponty’s work in the late 1960s as the transient moment of thoughts (Morishita 2009, 23).
3. The scene Kuniyoshi refers to appears in story 38 of volume 3 in *Nihon Ryōiki*. Hijikata himself gave this reference in his lecture in 1985 (Hijikata [1985] 2004).
4. Here, I extend the use of the term “postwar” to cover the 1970s. The term “postwar” in Japan involves some complexities, including when it started and ended, given the “return” of Okinawa to mainland Japan which was suspended until 1972, unresolved security and constitution issues, and the fact that prewar historical studies used “postwar” to refer to the social changes that took place after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. See D. Slaymaker (2004, 5–6); M. Sas (2011, 221).
5. For example, critic Anna Kisselgoff writes on butoh group Sankaijuku’s performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival, “A Japanese dance form whose implicit reference has been the bomb, Butoh has made the idea of rebirth after catastrophe a familiar motif” (Kisselgoff, “NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL REVIEW; Rebirth And Healing By a Shaman,” *The New York Times*, November 21 2002, E00001).
6. Deleuze considers sensation as “the master of deformations, the agent of bodily deformations” (2003, 32). With reference to Cézanne and phenomenological tradition such as to Erwin Straus’s distinction between perception and sensation – perception as a rational organization of a non-rational sensation – and Merleau-Ponty’s distinction between patient’s touching the point of his nose as it is bitten by a mosquito and pointing to his nose with finger a moment later – touching took place within the intentional system of bodily space (sensation) and pointing required the abstract coordination of points in external space (perception) – Daniel W. Smith explains that Deleuze requires the work of sensation constituted by the vital power of rhythm, more than the phenomenological lived body or world of lived experience that captures the prerational world of sensation as coextensive with the world of perception (“Translator’s Introduction: Deleuze on Bacon: Three Conceptual Trajectories in *The Logic of Sensation*,” in *Francis Bacon*, xiv).
7. Artaud’s collection of essays *The Theater and its Double* (1931–36) was translated into Japanese in 1965 and was followed in 1971 by a collection of his complete works.
8. In this scrapbook (one of 16 volumes), volume D001, *Nadare ame*, Hijikata also collects flowing and deforming images of bodies by Klimt (whose 1912 image *Mäda Primavesi* provided inspiration for the costume used in Hijikata’s work, *Avalanche Candy*), Turner, de Kooning, and Dali, depicted in different materials, from pastel, oil, to gouache. On a scrapbook on birds, Hijikata remarks on the “slow motion” evoked by Bacon’s paintings of faces and birds, as well as in the gestures of lying down, crossing the bridge, and sitting on a chair (volume D007, *Tori-Shigi* [Birds and Sandpipers]). I consulted with Hijikata’s butoh fu and scrapbooks at Hijikata Tatsumi Archive, Keio University Art Center.
9. From the item 3 “Bacon,” Yukio Waguri version, *Butoh fu*, made available at Hijikata Tatsumi Archive, Keio University Art Center. See also “Butoh fu: Asbestos kan no butoh seisei no sōsu” by Hijikata Tatsumi Archive in *Hijikata Tatsumi no Butoh* (2004, 165–66). It was also verified that there was a copy of Rudolf Laban’s dance notation, “Labanotation” (published in Japan 1958) at the Asbestos Studio, with what appears to be Hijikata’s name written on its back page.

10. Cited from C. P. Bru's *Esthétique de l'abstraction* and Henri Michaux's *Aventures de lignes*, respectively.

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## Notes on contributor

**Fusako Innami** is an Assistant Professor in Japanese and Performance Studies at the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham University. Her research interests include the body and the senses, intimacy, and inter-media translation, including the translation of bodily experiences into language and the circulation of ideas. Her monograph on touch, *Touching the Unreachable: Writing, Skinship, Modern Japan*, is forthcoming (the University of Michigan Press, 2021). She is a recipient of the 2012 New Scholars' Prize (second place) from the International Federation for Theatre Research, and her commissioned works in performing arts for cultural organizations include those at Bunkamura in Tokyo and Glyndebourne Opera in Sussex, UK.

## ORCID

Fusako Innami  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2364-7363>

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